THE POLITICS OF THE PULL REQUEST: HOW OPEN STANDARDS CAN SHIFT POWER

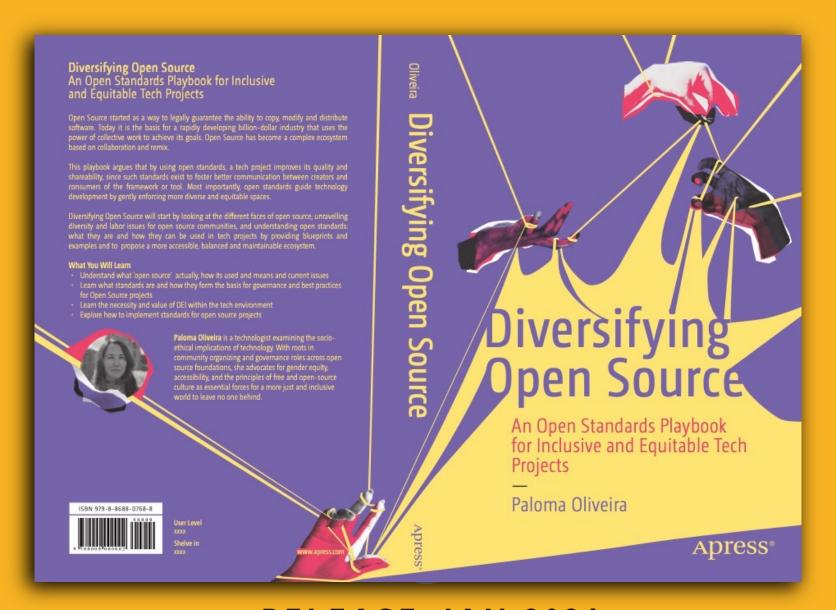
INTERACTING





OPEN SOURCE IS...

What if open source isn't about collaborating on code, but A TOOL AGAINST ASYMMETRY?



RELEASE: JAN 2026

The technologies we create don't just do things,

communities, access, power identities.







Invisible by default

A meritocracy trap

OPEN TO WHOP

When the world is designed around an 'average man,' women become invisible. Technology that's supposed to protect us ends up harming half the population.

Open source can fall into the same trap—if our standards and governance only reflect those already in the room, we risk building systems that quietly exclude everyone else.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Transit systems are often designed for the "average commuter": someone going from

home → work → home

But women are more likely to make multiple shorter "trip chains" (school drop-offs, elder care, groceries). When planners ignore this, routes and schedules serve men better, while women face longer, more complex commutes.

When only one pattern of use is considered, others are made invisible.

In open source, if we only design for a linear, full-time, single-contributor model, we erase the realities of those balancing care, work, or other forms of labor.

INVISIBLE WOMAN, CAROLINE CRIADO PEREZ

This is the myth of meritocracy: it pretends to reward talent and effort, but in reality it bakes in privilege.

Open source does the same if we only count code commits as merit.

Who has the time, the financial security, the freedom to make thousands of unpaid contributions? If we don't question what we reward, we replicate inequality under the banner of fairness.

A NEW ARISTOCRACY

Elite education and jobs are hoarded by the wealthiest families. They can afford the best schools, test prep, unpaid internships, and networks that pass opportunity down like inheritance.

The result: a **closed loop**, where the "winners" of meritocracy are overwhelmingly the children of those who already won before.

He calls this the **new aristocracy**: not based on noble birth titles, but on access to elite education and professional tracks that are effectively inaccessible to outsiders.

The very people locked out of elite pipelines are also locked out of shaping technology.

Tech becomes part of the exclusion, reproducing the same aristocracy under the guise of openness.

THE MERITOCRACY TRAP, DANIEL MARKOVITS

HOW POWER FLOWS IN OPEN SOURCE (BY DESIGN)

VSD Shaping Technology with Moral Imagination

Who's in the room?

Doing what?

Who is been affected?

Open by Design

Open by default means setting standards that make equity the default, not the exception.

Design approach that integrates human values (equity, inclusion, justice) into technology from the start, not as an afterthought.

VALUE SENSITIVE DESIGN

Identifies **stakeholders** (not just users, but those affected).

Surfaces values in tension (efficiency vs. accessibility, speed vs. fairness).

Embeds these values into technical + governance decisions.

Uses iteration: designs are tested not only for function, but for impact on people.

Moves projects from "anyone can join" → "everyone can belong."

Makes invisible contributions (docs, community care) visible and valued.

Ensures standards (CoCs, governance, contribution guides) act as **tools of equity**, not gatekeeping.

VALUE SENSITIVE DESIGN: SHAPING TECHNOLOGY WITH MORAL IMAGINATION, BATYA FRIEDMAN AND DANIEL G. HENDRY

SHIFTING POWER WITH STANDARDS "GENTLE ENFORCEMENT"

Standards as tools

Docs and governance quietly shape who belongs

Every pull request = whose voice gets merged

Whose voices are missing?

SPACES OF AND FOR LIBERATION

PyLadies

Feminist Al Lan Party

Spaces of freedom, consciousness, and care



OPEN SOURCE AS CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE



Sovereign Tech Agency



PALOMA OLIVEIRA
paloma@sovereign.tech

@ discombobulateme@fosstodon.org